

## **Governor Barbour: “Save Medicaid”**

***Medicaid Director: “Without action by Friday, the cost of health care services for nearly one out of every four Mississippians will rise 100%.”***

(Jackson, Miss.) Governor Haley Barbour and Division of Medicaid Executive Director Dr. Warren Jones had a simple message today at a press conference in Jackson: Save Medicaid before it's too late for 780,000 Mississippians.

Facing a Friday deadline before the program is unable to pay health care providers who serve more than 780,000 Medicaid recipients, House and Senate negotiators have yet to fill a \$268 million deficit. If the deficit is not addressed before Friday, the cost of health care services for nearly one out of every four Mississippians will rise 100% until June 30, 2005 – the end of the state's fiscal year.

Dr. Jones explained that problems have already begun because of the program's continuing uncertainty. “Unfortunately, health care providers in Mississippi have begun refusing services to Medicaid recipients. In addition, I will be meeting with Personnel Board officials this week to

determine the status of Division of Medicaid employees,” he said.

Dr. Jones noted that as the head of Medicaid and as a doctor, it saddens him to hear of situations like that of a 15-month-old Medicaid beneficiary from Wiggins who was refused a life-saving heart surgery Friday from a hospital in Ohio that specializes in infant heart surgeries. “The reason the hospital gave for the refusal was the uncertainty surrounding Mississippi Medicaid,” said Jones.

Governor Barbour made clear that time is wasting and there is only one option available to legislators – the Health Care Trust Fund. “We cannot tax or cut enough in three and a half months to cover a \$268 million deficit – that is not a political statement it is a mathematical fact,” said Governor Barbour. “The longer the Legislature waits the more dire the circumstances become for Mississippi’s Medicaid recipients.”

Governor Barbour noted that the cigarette tax hike the House is holding out for in their negotiations would raise less than 10% of the money required for the deficit. “The decision is not ‘tax hike’ versus ‘trust fund.’ The decision is ‘trust fund’ versus ‘no more Medicaid’ – and that shouldn’t be a tough decision,” he said. The Governor added that

Medicaid law combined with a federal judge's decision to delay his PLAD reform make Medicaid cuts large enough to fill the deficit impossible.

The Governor said he was concerned about recent public talk by some lawmakers that they were willing to shut down the program. "It disappoints me when people suggest shutting down health care services for almost a fourth of the state to make a political point. Medicaid is too important to play with," he said.

The Governor and Jones also explained that the deficit needed to be addressed before late Friday night. According to state officials, utilization of Health Care Trust Fund money requires several days of advance notice and coordination by the Treasurer's Office and the Health Care Trust Fund Board.

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